

# Toward and Away From

(Direction)

## Background

- Research clearly shows that people (both children and adults) learn about new places by building what one researcher calls a “simplified mental hierarchy” of key landmarks and then fitting new knowledge into that mental map. When asked to give directions to a place, these people often organize their answer as a sequence of landmarks that the person travel toward or away from. (They occasionally add instructions to turn left or right, east or west, etc.)
- Students who learn a useful framework of landmarks in their local area tend to be more successful in learning new places (local, national, and global). A key foundation for that knowledge is a clear understanding of the concepts of toward and away as they apply to things shown on a map.

## Materials (in general, the larger the better for hands-on materials)

- (from previous lessons) a classroom model or map, on a table or desk near the middle of the room
- small objects to represent features in the room (e.g., marble for globe, block for desk).
- maps of the local community, the borough, and larger areas.

## Procedures

- put a small object on a model or map of the classroom to represent a similar-shaped object in the room; verify that students understand the idea of representation (concept from a previous lesson)
- put a doll or paper crown on the map to indicate the location of a particular student.
- ask that student to describe how to go from his/her present location to the object
- ask other questions and listen
- VARIATION: put a small object on the map or model of the classroom, point to a landmark on the map that you would go toward in order to get to the object, and ask students whether the suggested route would work in the real classroom as well as on the map
- VARIATION: put a small object on the map or model, describe a route by naming a landmark that is NOT in the correct direction, and ask students to correct the mistake
- VARIATION: put towels or large pieces of construction paper on every desk, hide a “treasure” such as a photo or certificate for a reward under one, show its location on the “room-model,” and ask students to write directions to guide someone else to the object
- EXTENSION: have students describe routes to prominent landmarks in Harlem, using words like toward, away from, uptown, downtown, east, west, higher number street or avenue, lower number street or avenue, etc.
- EXTENSION: have students hide treasures and describe their locations to other students, who in turn place objects on the map as a guide to a third group of students who then seek the treasure
- EXTENSION: make a similar manipulable map of the playground or a nearby park
- Middle-school EXTENSION: students describe trips across their, the United States, or to another country, naming key landmarks for each leg of the trip

## Learner outcomes:

- awareness that landmarks and simple direction terms (e.g., toward or away) can describe routes
- enhanced ability to describe relative locations of things, and to give and interpret directions

## Issues to be resolved:

- A BIG ISSUE. How fast can we move “up” the hierarchy from room to school to community to state to country? A common problem is to move too fast, assuming that children get the concept, when all they are doing is mimicking an adult without understanding what the symbols represent.
- A MEDIUM ISSUE. Inconsistency in language can also cause a problem. It doesn’t really matter whether you call it a “desktop map” or a “room model” or a “model room,” but stick with one term.

# Toward and Away - Developmental Sequence

**Background:** As with any statement of developmental sequence, this list indicates *might* happen with a typical child. It is not a prescription of what *must* happen in precisely this order in a classroom.

**Stage 1:** Individuals describe an object as being toward a named landmark or away from it.

Teacher points to the globe and the closet door and asks if the globe is toward the door or away from it (choose features and landmarks that fit the local classroom).

Repeat with variations until the concepts of *toward*, *away from*, *between*, and *beyond* are clear.

**Stage 2:** Students select symbols to show objects on a classroom map/model.

Teacher holds up a model of a feature in the classroom (e.g. a marble for the globe). Teacher then points to a landmark near the edge of the room (e.g. the entrance door, blackboard, or window) and identifies a symbol for the landmark on the map or model. Finally, teacher asks students to place the marble in the correct position “toward the landmark” in the model.

VARIATION: Teacher places an object in the model, describes its position as toward or away from a named landmark, and asks students if its position is correctly described. Repeat with various combinations of objects and landmarks until students get the idea of directional representation. Like many other aspects that seem “intuitively obvious” to adults, this distinction has to be learned and may take some time and/or repetition.

**Stage 3:** Students describe a route to a destination as a sequence of movements toward named landmarks or in named directions.

Teacher names a destination in the classroom and asks students to write directions to it.

Teacher names a destination on the playground and asks students to write directions to it.

VARIATION: repeat with other combinations of origin, destination, and route – including some erroneous directions that should be corrected. Perhaps note that we are learning words that might help us find a treasure later.

**Stage 4:** Students describe a route toward a nearby store or other familiar place in the neighborhood.

Teacher asks whether anyone knows how to get to [name a store or other feature]. Teacher asks students to write directions as a series of landmarks to move toward (see Figure for example).

VARIATION: Add the concept of directional turn (left, right, east, west) where appropriate. The goal is to combine a recommended turn with a statement of a new landmark to move toward (or to turn away from another landmark that is prominent but not on the correct path).

**Stage 5:** Students connect their route instructions with landmarks that are much farther away.

In Harlem, student descriptions of routes could specify Central Park, 125<sup>th</sup> St, downtown, uptown, and crosstown going toward higher-numbered avenues or lower-numbered ones.

**Stage 6:** Students connect their route instructions with global directions – north, east, south, west.

Teacher point to a feature on a map and asks which direction we would go in order to go toward that feature. Start with simple and familiar features such as Yankee Stadium or the Empire State Building. In time, build toward more abstract destinations such as the state capital, Boston, or Miami (but be careful to ensure that students remain able to make the logical connection back to the simple process of naming a destination landmark in a classroom).

**Assessment game:** Put towels (sheets of construction paper, takeout dinner trays, etc.) on several tables in the room, hide a flat object (e.g., a photo) under one towel, represent it as being toward or away from a named symbol on the classroom map, and have students search for it. Represent it as being in a particular direction (north, east, etc.) from a named landmark and have students search for it. Reverse the process: students hide a treasure and show its location on a map for others to read.

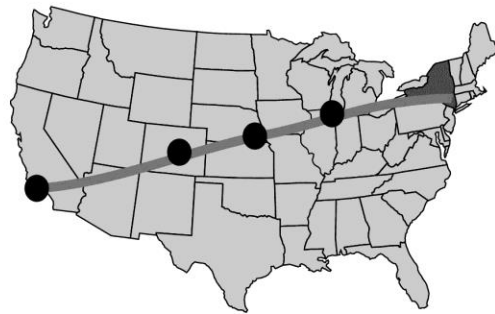
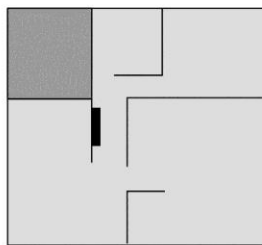
**Forward:** repeat the process for larger areas – city, state, country, continent, world – as appropriate.

# Toward and Away

# 1

Many people give directions by naming a prominent feature as a target.

The picture is on the left wall of the hall as you go toward the bedroom.



You pass Chicago, Omaha, and Denver as you go from NY toward Los Angeles

Toward and Away - Basic Idea

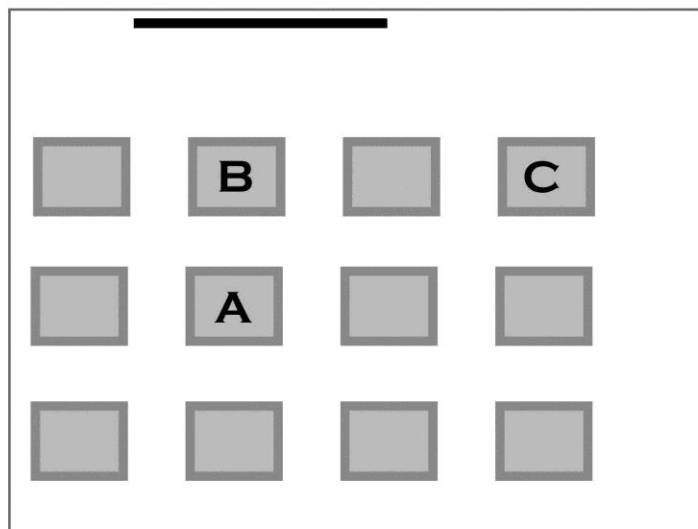
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# Toward and Away

# 2

Which desk is toward the blackboard from desk A?

Which one is toward the door?



Toward and Away - Relative Position

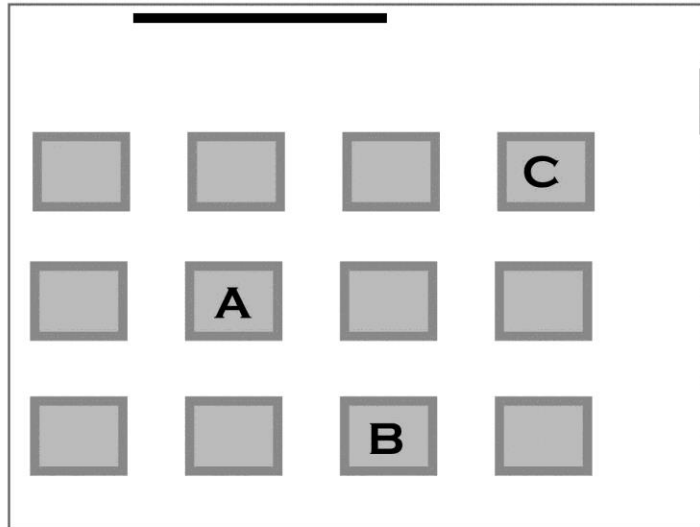
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## Toward and Away

# 3

To get to desk B from desk A, go one desk toward the door, turn right, and go one desk away from the blackboard.

How do you go from B to C?  
then back to A?



Toward and Away - Landmarks

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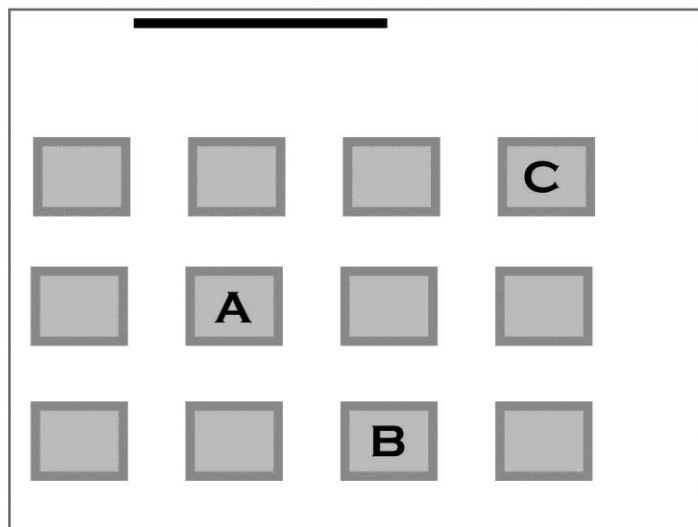
## Toward and Away

# 4

If the blackboard is on the east wall, go one desk west and one south to go to desk B from desk A.

How do you go from B to C?

then back to A?



Toward and Away - Directions

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## Toward and Away

# 5

To get to 116th Street  
from HarlemSuccess School,  
go two blocks toward Central Park.

Is Marcus Garvey Park  
toward or away from  
Central Park?

To get to Central Park  
from HarlemSuccess School,  
go six blocks toward downtown  
on Malcolm X Boulevard.

Do you go uptown or downtown  
to get to Marcus Garvey Park?

Toward and Away - Landmarks

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## Toward and Away

# 6



To travel  
to Seattle  
from New York,  
go toward the west.

What direction  
do you go from NY  
to get to Miami?

to Kansas City?

Are you more likely to see  
Kansas City or Los Angeles  
if you fly from Miami toward Seattle ?

This middle-school task  
is the eventual goal.

Toward and Away - Directions

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# Toward and Away

# 7

I'm thinking of a "mystery building."  
Start at HarlemSuccess School,  
go two blocks toward Central Park.

Turn right on 116th street.

Go about half a block,  
and look toward the south.

The building is a store,  
it has a brown awning,  
it is next to . . . etc. until they  
guess its  
name.



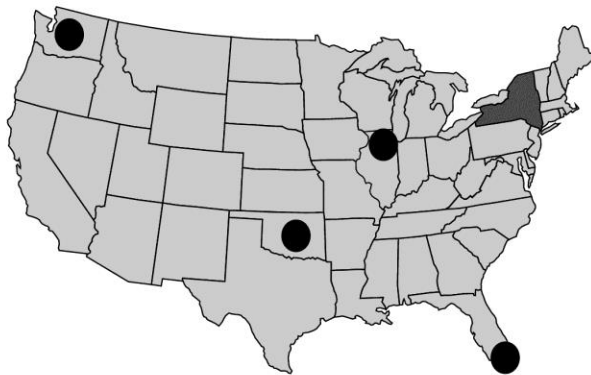
Toward and Away - City Directions

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# Toward and Away

# 8

I'm thinking of a "mystery city."



Start in New York,  
go toward the west  
to Chicago, then  
about half as far  
toward Oklahoma.  
Turn left, and go  
almost twice as far.

My city has a beach  
on the ocean.

What is its name?

This middle-school task  
is the eventual goal.

Toward and Away - Map Directions

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